Thomas Mitchell Park's pond to be saved

Grant to pay for nearly $250,000 in improvements to watershed, pond

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The problem-plagued pond at Thomas Mitchell Park will be saved thanks to $246,920 from the Watershed Improvement Review Board.

Just last week, the Polk County Conservation Board was informed that they will receive nearly a quarter of a million dollar grant to rehabilitate the watershed above the pond at Thomas Mitchell Park and the pond itself.

"I think it will be a project of real interest to people... you rarely get to do this kind of restoration work, so it is a really valuable project," said Pat Boddy, director of Polk County Conservation.

According to Boddy, the project, which includes a series of watershed improvement projects and dredging the pond, is estimated to take three years.

"Part of the money is going to go toward water and sediment control basins above the pond," said Brandon Dittman, Camp Creek Watershed Project coordinator. "There are several gullies that are cutting into the park's property and those gullies are just dumping dirt into the pond."

The control basins, once they are in place, will prevent dirt from sliding into the pond.

The approximately 40-year-old pond is nearly silted in and almost devoid of life.

According to ranger Brian Herrsterom, the water levels in the pond were down due to the dry summer of 2007 and there wasn't any water flowing into the pond. This caused the water temperature in the pond to rise, which meant that the water was holding less oxygen for the fish.

"The situation suffocated the fish out. There's still fish in the pond, just not in any size or in number for the anglers to fish," Herrsterom said.

Dittman noted that the pond has been a popular place to fish.

Now, the pond is only seven to eight feet deep, as opposed to the 25-30 feet the pond had when it was created about 40 years ago, according to Dittman.

Dittman estimates that if the pond is dredged and the basin improvements are made, the pond will continue to act as an effective sediment trap for more than 100 years.